

# National Park Hikes

Sample the best of our crown-jewel lands on these superlative trips.

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## Best Scenery

Yosemite National Park, CA

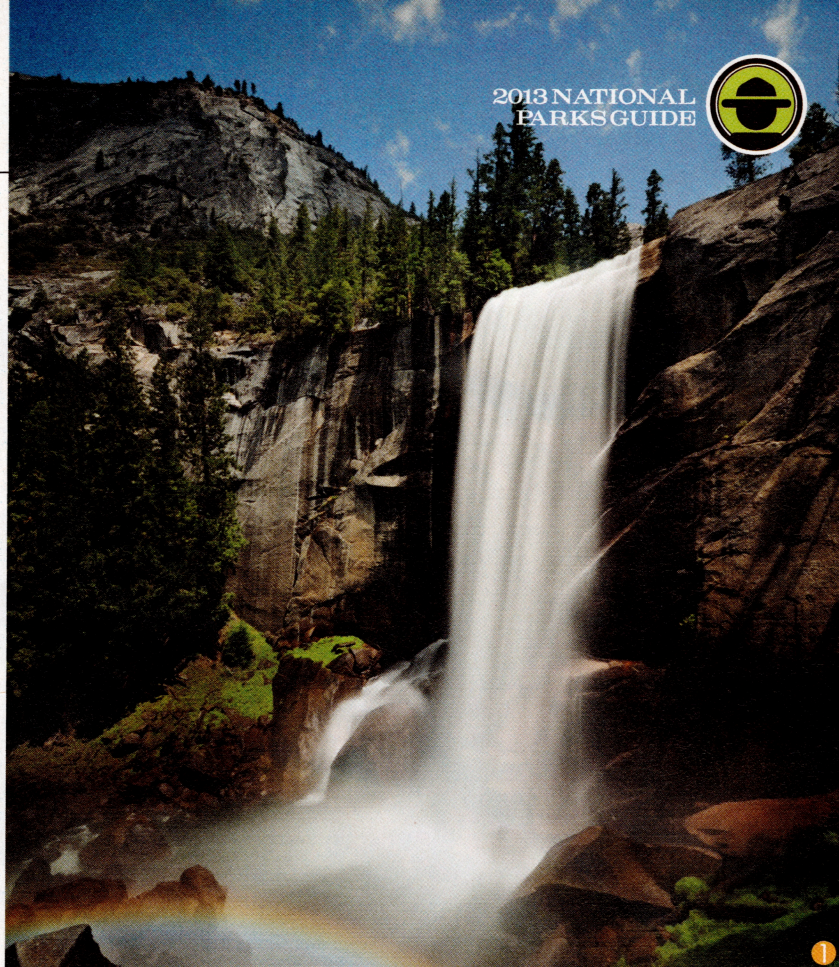
### Four Mile to Mist Trail

This must-do tour of Yosemite's granite and whitewater highlights is so breathtaking, the park's godfather, John Muir himself, specifically recommended it as the area's premier dayhike. But the nation's best views can attract big crowds; hit Muir's route on a weekday in June before summer season peaks, or wait until after Labor Day. Begin the 13.3-mile horseshoe at the Four Mile trailhead beneath Sentinel Rock and grind up 3,200 feet on more than 40 switchbacks as the morning sun sets the valley walls aglow. Catch your breath at Glacier Point while you peer into the valley from your 3,000-foot-tall perch, surrounded by the glacier-hewn faces of Half Dome, Royal Arches, the Three Brothers, and El Capitan. Descend the Panorama Trail toward the quiet of Illilouette Basin and the rumbling of two of Yosemite's most famous waterfalls: Nevada and Vernal. Muir recommended resting your legs beside the cascades before following the Merced River down toward "the stupendous scenery into the heart of which the white passionate river goes wildly thundering, surpassing everything of its kind in the world." Enough said. (209-372-0200; [nps.gov/yose](http://nps.gov/yose)) **TRIP ID** 2148883

**THE WAY** From the El Portal entrance, take El Portal Rd. and Southside Dr. to Four Mile trailhead. After hiking, take the free Valley Shuttle to the visitor center, then the El Capitan Shuttle (runs until 6 p.m., June-Oct.) back to Four Mile.



2 CLAY HOODOOS



MUIR-WORTHY: VERNAL FALL'S 317-FOOT CASCADE USUALLY REACHES PEAK FLOW IN LATE MAY.

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## Best Solitude

Theodore Roosevelt National Park, ND

### Achenbach Trail

Big sky, wind- and rain-etched buttes, and the wandering Little Missouri River make up the wild and less-visited north unit of this off-the-radar park. The park sees a fifth as many visitors as Yellowstone, so you're more likely to meet a bison than a hiker on the 9.4-mile out-and-back to Achenbach Spring, even during peak season (July and August). Watch for pronghorns, golden eagles, and beavers as you test your route-finding skills on game trails crisscrossing the rust and ochre badlands. You'll ford the river (check with rangers for levels) as it traverses the rugged, silent Achenbach Hills. Yearning for more? Cross the Little Missouri again for a 17.8-mile overnight loop. Come in June to catch prairie wildflowers in bloom, including prickly pear cactus and prairie rose, or wait until fall to dodge the heat. Pack in all your water. (701-842-2333; [nps.gov/thro](http://nps.gov/thro)) **TRIP ID** 2148924

**THE WAY** From Watford City, go 14 miles on US 85 S. Turn right on Scenic Dr. and go 4.9 miles to the Juniper Campground.

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## Best Swimming Holes

Shenandoah National Park, VA

### Whiteoak Canyon Loop

Nine waterfalls with ideal splash ponds and a natural slide await on this tough, 8.6-mile loop through two of Shenandoah's steepest (and most beautiful) canyons. Whiteoak's falls draw crowds, so plan an overnight to have the pools to yourself. Start from the Whiteoak Canyon trailhead on a weekday afternoon and set up camp in the first .7 mile (not allowed past this point). Wake up early, load a daypack, and alternate sweating and soaking on the Whiteoak Canyon Trail—you'll soon enjoy dips beneath six waterfalls—as you work your way up 2,450 feet to the Whiteoak Fire Road. Then drop into Cedar Run basin, Whiteoak's quieter sister canyon. Its three falls make for a grand finale—the final one has a natural slide carved in the rock. Take the link trail back to Whiteoak to grab your stashed pack on the way out. (540-999-3500; [nps.gov/shen](http://nps.gov/shen)) **TRIP ID** 2207502

**THE WAY** From Sperryville, take VA 231 S 10.2 miles. Turn right on SR 643. In 4.5 miles, bear right on Weakly Hollow Rd. to the trailhead.

\*View free interactive maps and detailed trip reports by adding the **Trip ID** to [backpacker.com/hikes/](http://backpacker.com/hikes/)\_\_\_\_\_.